

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Why bother with meetings?

Much time at work is spent in meetings but if the meetings fail to produce anything useful it can seem that this time is wasted. It is understandable in these circumstances that employees believe that meetings detract from, rather than assist, their work. However, if they are managed effectively, meetings can be an excellent way to generate teamwork and commitment to shared goals, to ensure that all employees have the right information to do their jobs well, to keep track of progress against company goals and solve problems. They also give employees a forum to raise issues and make suggestions. As such they form an important part of any system for managing company performance.

When well planned and controlled, meetings can therefore be a useful management tool and so it is important that the chairperson prepares properly for the meeting. The practical steps outlined below can help to ensure that meetings are more productive.

In advance of the meeting:

1. Why have a meeting?

Certain management meetings will need to be held regularly, with actions agreed at the end of one meeting picked up at the next, others may be one-off meetings in response to a particular situation or event.

Meetings must have a purpose otherwise they are a waste of time. Ensure that the meeting is really necessary and that the information cannot be provided by other means e.g. email, memo etc. What is the purpose of the meeting? Is it to share information? Gather ideas? Connect with others? All of these? What outcome should it realise? What is required to realise that outcome? List the objectives to be fulfilled in the agenda.

2. Who needs to be there?

Ensure that the right people are there and only those people who need to be there. What do they need to contribute? Do they need to do something before the meeting? During the meeting?

3. What resources are needed?

What aids or equipment are needed? What information do you need to have available before the meeting? During the meeting?

4. Practicalities

Decide how long is necessary for the meeting and arrange an appropriate venue. Ensure that the time and venue are suitable for all participants. It is worth remembering that meetings can also be held through conference calls and webinars as well as face to face.

5. Determine the agenda

If there is no agenda there is no meeting. List the specific outcomes required from the meeting clearly and precisely. Beside each topic, note the outcome required (decision, action etc), who is going to lead on this topic and the amount of time allocated to discussing it. Ensure the agenda is circulated to all participants well in advance.

6. Encourage proper preparation

Ensure that all participants have the same expectations of the meeting and that all relevant information is provided in advance. This means that participants can come to the meeting well prepared and this will save time in the meeting itself.

Well in advance, provide details of:

- Start and end times – ask people to be there 10 minutes in advance for tea or coffee and state that the meeting will begin promptly at the start time;
- Venue;
- Purpose – what the meeting is expected to accomplish;
- Agenda with approximate timings;
- Any necessary documentation to read or prepare before the meeting;
- Information required for the meeting;
- Any resources, reports etc they need to bring to the meeting;
- An attendance list – check with participants invited whether anyone else needs to be there.

SECTION 13

During the meeting:

1. **Appoint a Chairperson** if this has not already been done. The chair's responsibilities include ensuring that:
 - everyone is clear on the objective of the meeting;
 - all contribute;
 - the agenda is adhered to;
 - one topic is discussed at a time;
 - objectives are achieved;
 - the meeting stays on time;
 - summaries are provided at intervals;
 - decisions are taken and recorded;
 - actions are agreed; and
 - date and time of any follow up meeting is agreed.
2. **Start the meeting on time.** Set an expectation that participants should make the effort to attend at the specified time.
3. **Open the meeting** by stating the objective of the meeting, clarifying roles and establishing any ground rules.
4. **Stick to the agenda** and use it to structure the meeting. Keep track of time.
5. **Keep the discussion brief and relevant.**
6. If an important issue arises, which will require detailed discussion, **schedule another meeting if necessary.**
7. **Summarise at intervals** and recap on agreed actions at the end.
8. **Take notes** throughout the meeting. Meetings without notes are pointless. It can help to take notes on a flipchart or whiteboard so that everyone has the same view of what has been agreed.
9. If helpful, take five minutes at the end to **evaluate the meeting** and agree how future meetings could be more effective. Ensure that feedback is incorporated into future meetings.

After the meeting:

1. **Circulate minutes and action points** to relevant people immediately after the meeting. Minutes should be brief but also precise and clear. All actions should be clearly described, have a deadline and be assigned to a particular person (see Appendix 13A for template).
2. **Follow up on** agreed actions.
3. **Review actions** at any follow up meetings.

APPENDIX 13A

MEETING ACTION LIST

MEETING TITLE _____

DATE: _____

ATTENDEES: _____

Task	Priority (1,2,3)	Target Date	Person Responsible	Status
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				